THE EFFECT OF NATIONAL SOCIAL INVESTMENT PROGRAMS AGENCY ON POVERTY REDUCTION IN SOUTH EAST NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: This study investigated the Effect of the National Social Investment Programs Agency on Poverty Reduction in South East Nigeria from 2015 - 2023. Specifically, the study is designed to examine the effect of the N-power program on job creation in Southeast East Nigeria, ascertain the effect of the Government Enterprise and Empowerment program in enhancing small-scale business in Southeast East Nigeria, determine the effect of conditional cash transfer in addressing income inequality in south East Nigeria. The study was carried out in five randomly selected major cities in South East Nigeria (Enugu, Umuahia, Abakaliki, Anambra, and Owerri). The study employed survey research method. The population for the study comprised eight hundred and seventy-six (2876) residents in the five selected major cities in South East Nigeria, while three hundred and fifty-one (351) respondents were sampled using Taro Yamane sampling techniques. A questionnaire designed by the researcher served as the instrument for data collection. The data collected were analysed using simple percentages while the hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance using chi-square. The findings of the study revealed that the National Social Investment Program has a positive significant effect in enhancing the standard of living in South East Nigeria; the National Social Investment Program has a positive significant effect in creating job opportunities in South East Nigeria. Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made: national social investment agency should develop programs that are tailored to the specific needs and challenges of South East Nigeria, which will help address the succession agitation in the area; local communities should be actively engaged in planning and implementation of social investment programs; national social investment program should focus in investing in education and vocational training programs to equip individuals with the skill needed for gainful employment.

Keywords: Poverty Reduction, National Social Investment Programs, Job Creation, Income Inequality, Southeast Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Poverty is a global issue that affects millions of people around the world. According to the World Bank, global poverty is defined as living on less than $1.90 a day. As of 2020, an estimated 9.2% of the world's population, or around 690 million people, live below this threshold (UNDP, 2020). The causes of poverty are complex and varied, but they often include factors such as low income, limited access to education and healthcare, conflict, and natural disasters. Poverty has severe consequences, including malnutrition, limited access to clean water and sanitation, limited opportunities for personal growth and development, higher rates of disease, and even death. Efforts to address poverty have been ongoing, but progress has been slow. Many organizations, governments, and individuals have implemented various strategies to help alleviate poverty, such as providing financial assistance, improving access to education and healthcare, and promoting economic development (Collier, 2007, World Bank 2020, Anthropocene, 2019)

Global efforts to eradicate poverty have been ongoing for decades, with various organizations, governments, and international bodies working together to address this issue. Some of the key efforts include:(1) United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs): In 2000, the United Nations adopted the MDGs, which were a set of 8 international development goals that aimed to reduce poverty and improve the lives of the world's poorest people by 2015 (IMF, 2019). The MDGs were successful in driving global development efforts and helped to reduce poverty rates, improve access to education and healthcare, and reduce child mortality. (2) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): In 2015, the United Nations adopted the SDGs, which are a set of 17 global goals that aim to end poverty, reduce inequality, and protect the planet. The SDGs are a successor to the MDGs and have a broader focus on sustainable development. Goal number one of the SDGs is to end poverty in all its forms everywhere, with a target to reduce the proportion of the population living in extreme poverty to less than 3% by 2030. (3) World Bank's International Development Association (IDA): The World Bank established the IDA in 1960 to provide concessional loans and grants to the world's poorest countries. The IDA has since become the largest source of assistance for the world's poorest countries, providing over $130 billion in cumulative commitments since its inception. (4) United Nations Development Programme (UNDP): The UNDP is the United Nations' global development network, which works to eradicate poverty and reduce inequalities through sustainable development. The UNDP provides technical assistance, policy advice, and financial support to help countries develop and implement effective development strategies. (5) Non-governmental organizations (NGOs): Numerous NGOs, such as Oxfam, Save the Children, and CARE, work to alleviate poverty and promote sustainable development in developing countries. These organizations often focus on specific issues, such as hunger, education, and healthcare, and work to empower marginalized communities through grassroots initiatives and advocacy (UNDP, 2020).

However, developing nations has not been left out in the fight against poverty for instance Latin America has made significant progress in reducing poverty, with various efforts implemented by governments, organizations, and communities. Some notable initiatives include: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) Poverty Reduction Strategy; Organization of American States (OAS) Inter-American Social Protection Network; Latin American and Caribbean Regional Development Bank (CAF) Social Development Program, in the same way Asia has made significant progress in reducing poverty over the past few decades, with various efforts implemented by governments, organizations, and communities. Some notable initiatives include: Asian Development Bank's (ADB) Poverty Reduction Strategy; Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Socio-Cultural Community's Poverty Alleviation Program; South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Social Charter. Consequently, Africa has made significant progress in reducing poverty, with various efforts implemented by governments, organizations, and communities. Some notable initiatives include: African Union's (AU) Agenda 2063: Poverty reduction and economic development; New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD): Economic growth and poverty reduction; African Development Bank's (AfDB) Poverty Reduction Strategy

To address this ugly scenario several the Nigeria governments had joined the global communities in fight against poverty by adopting several strategies aimed at eliminating poverty in Nigeria. These strategies adopted by the Nigeria government in fight against poverty include;, Gown's Accelerated Food Production Programme (AFPP), Obasanjo's Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), Shagari's River Basin Development Authority (RBDA) and Green Revolution (GR) Babangida's Mass Mobilization for Social and Economic Recovery (MAMSER), National Directorate for Employment (NDE), Directorate for Food, Road and Rural Infrastructural (DFRRI) Better Life for Rural Women Programme (BLP) National Agricultural Land Development Authority (NALDA), People's Bank of Nigeria (PBN) Nigerian Agricultural and Cooperative Bank (NACB), Abacha's Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP), Obasanjo's Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP) etc. All failed not because of poor conception but on account of operationalization, haphazard, non-focused, blurred, corrupt and selfish implementation process. Most often than not these programmes are hijacked by corrupt, selfish and self-centred individuals or groups within the domain of power. The resultant end is always epileptic, dismal implementation or performance of the programme. A good example is the Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP), a lot of enthusiasm, huge amount of money and human resource were committed to the programme but its impact in alleviating poverty is a disappointment because it was never felt. More so, attempts by the Federal Government to use the Peoples Bank to alleviate poverty equally failed. The Micro-credit policy of the bank could not make the desired impact on the target group of urban poor and rural people. In fact, it became a veritable source of free money for the powerful or privileged few who carted away the millions of naira for the scheme and such monies were never paid back.

Meanwhile, these strategies have not yielded the expected outcome in reducing poverty as the incidence of poverty in Nigeria is still very high. It is as a result of the failure of these strategies that the National Social Investment Program (NSIP) was launched by the Nigeria government in 2016 to address poverty and improve the welfare of Nigerian citizen. The initiative is implemented by the National Social Investment Program Agency, in Nigeria has several objectives aimed at improving the lives to citizens. Particularly the vulnerable populations, the primary objective of the agency are to reduce poverty and hunger to promote equitable resource distribution to vulnerable population including children, youth and women, to foster economic development by providing financial support and training to business and entrepreneurs, to achieve the above objectives the agency introduced the following key programs N-power programs, conditional cash transfer, (CCT), Government Enterprise and Empowerment programme (GEEP), Home Grown School Feeding Programme.

It is based on foregoing background that the researcher wishes to conduct an empirical investigation on the effect of National Social Investment Programs Agency on poverty reduction in South East Nigeria. The reason for choosing South East is because there is evidence of claims that South East is the most marginalized zone in Nigeria. Specifically, the study is designed to; examine the effect of the N-power program on job creation in South East Nigeria, ascertain the effect of the Government Enterprise and Empowerment program in enhancing small-scale business in South East Nigeria, determine the effect of conditional cash transfer in addressing income inequality in south East Nigeria. Why the study had not taken into cognizance the Home Grown School Feeding Programme, was because the programme was not implemented in the Southeast Region of Nigeria

LITERATURE REVIEW

Definition of poverty

Poverty is a multidimensional concept that seeks to measure levels of deprivation encountered by a person, household or community (USAID, 2020). Although most of the literature focuses on indicators of deprivation such as income, food, access to housing and so on, the choice of indicators to measure levels of deprivation can often be arbitrary and hence may not reflect a full-scale measure of unmet basic needs in different social contexts. This discrepancy leads to concepts such as poverty, social exclusion and vulnerability being used interchangeably in development discourse (World Food Programme, 2019).

While allowing for variations in indicators of unmet basic needs, poverty is generally considered to be a measure of deprivation of the basic needs that a person, household or community requires to have a basic standard of living. Deprivation can be measured either in terms of a lack of resources (e.g. income, assets), capabilities (e.g. skills, knowledge, technology) or both (USAID, 2020).

National Social Investment Program Agency

The National Social Investment Program (NSIP) Agency is a government agency established to oversee the implementation of the National Social Investment Program. Its primary mandate is to ensure that the program's objectives are achieved efficiently and effectively. The agency works closely with various stakeholders, including government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and international partners, to design, implement, and monitor the program's activities. The NSIP Agency plays a crucial role in ensuring that the program's activities are transparent, accountable, and responsive to the needs of the target population. It is responsible for managing the program's budget, monitoring its progress, and reporting its achievements to relevant stakeholders. The agency also works to ensure that the program's benefits are equitably distributed and that it reaches the most vulnerable segments of Nigerian society.

In summary, the National Social Investment Program Agency is a government agency established to oversee the implementation of the National Social Investment Program in Nigeria. Its primary mandate is to ensure that the program's objectives are achieved efficiently and effectively, and that its benefits are equitably distributed to the target population.

Objectives of national social investment programs

Consequently, the National Social Investment Programs (NSIP) were created in 2015 (and operational in 2016) to overcome the failings of the past so as to enshrine the values and vision for graduating Nigerian citizens from poverty circles through capacity building, investment and direct support (FGN, 2018). Strategically, the main objectives of NSIO are as follows:

i. Objective leadership and proactive monitoring and evaluation;
ii. Standard delivery mechanisms;
iii. Proper coordination and synergy among key ministries, departments and avenues as well as with states and LGAs of Nigeria.
iv. Built and implemented sustainable and long-term vision for social investment in Nigeria;
v. and elimination of duplication of roles and responsibilities as appropriate.

As a holistic approach for delivering the social investment portfolio, NSIP has four major arms:

A. N POWER (JOB CREATION AND YOUTH EMPLOYMENT)
B. NHGSFP (NATIONAL HOME-GROWN SCHOOL FEEDING PROGRAMME)
C. NASSCO (NATIONAL SOCIAL SAFETY NET PROGRAMME)
D. GEEPL (GOVERNMENT ENTERPRISE AND EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMME)

However, NASSCO programme has three pillars

1. NCTP (NATIONAL CASH TRANSFER PROGRAMME)
2. (2) YESSO (YOUTH EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL SUPPORT OPERATION)
3. (3) CSDP (COMMUNITY SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECT)

In general, the operational objectives of the above programs are as follows:

I. Increase the poor and vulnerable households with access to income (livelihood) by providing access to targeted funds so as to absorb economic shocks,
II. Reduce inequalities and wide disparities,
III. Increase access to education and health services so as to empower vulnerable sectors,
IV. Reduce rate of youth unemployment by linking interested volunteers to address observed gaps,
V. Eradicate malnutrition in school age children by establishing a sustainable school feeding program,
VI. Provide affordable credit to MSMEs and thereby increasing business revenue and facilitating market linkages,
VII. Stimulate productivity and growth (of the rural communities),
VIII. Capturing identities of unregistered and vulnerable groups for proper planning,
IX. And promotion of access to financial services so as to increase rate of financial inclusion.

However, the challenges associated with the process of N-SIP include

A. Lack of awareness (publicity) due to diverse and huge territory covered
B. Poor connectivity and internet access for technology-aided timely and secure payments
C. Remoteness of the locations where beneficiaries reside
D. Attempts by state officials to short-change field office and beneficiaries in their payments,
E. Unresponsive and unmotivated state officials,
F. Attempted racketeering around farmers-caterers food purchase process, and
G. Attempts to exploit the low literacy and poverty levels of some program beneficiaries by extorting unapproved fees from them.

N-POWER

N-POWER is a job creation and empowerment program of the National Social Investment Program (NSIP) of the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN). Basically, it is the employability and enhancement program aimed at imbibing the learn-work-entrepreneurship culture in youth between the ages of 18 and 35. Indeed, the FGN's aggressive investment in youth development targets some of the perennial inadequacies in public services, such as low teacher-to-pupil ratio in public primary schools, high rate of preventable disease and lack of taxable persons within the tax net. Using N POWER, the Nigerian government aims to utilize a large volunteer workforce to fix some of the problems in public services as well as stimulate the larger economy. It also focuses on providing our non-graduates with relevant technical and business skills that enhance their work outlook (livelihood). Essentially, the goals of N-POWER include:

1) To intervene and directly improve the livelihood of a critical mass of young unemployed Nigerians;
2) To develop a qualitative system for the transfer of employability, entrepreneurial and technical skills;
3) To create an ecosystem of solutions for ailing public services and government diversification policies and
4) To develop and enhance Nigeria's knowledge economy.

Structurally, the N-POWER volunteer corps is the post-tertiary engagement initiative for Nigerians between 18 and 35 with a paid volunteering programme of a two-year duration. Operationally, the graduates will undertake their primary tasks in identified public services within their proximate communities. They are also entitled to computing services that will contain information necessary for their specific engagement as well as information for their continuous training.

Specifically, N-POWER Teach Volunteers will help improve basic education delivery in Nigeria by being deployed as teacher assistants in primary schools. Again, as a component of the N-POWER teach program, N-POWER Teach (STEM) uses young graduates with the skills and interest in computer programming (and other related fields) to assist in the implementation of the Federal Government's STEM program for primary and secondary schools. Similarly, N-POWER Health volunteers will help improve and promote preventive healthcare in their communities to vulnerable members of the society (inclusive of pregnant women and children) as well as families and individuals. N-POWER Agro volunteers are expected to provide advisory service to farmers across the country by way of disseminating the required knowledge as well as gathering data of Nigeria's agriculture assets. Similarly, the voluntary Asset and income Declaration scheme (VAIDS) seeks to encourage non-compliant and partially compliant taxpayers to voluntarily declare their correct income and assets and then pay the appropriate tax due to the government. Essentially, this scheme is designed for one year after which participants who have performed commendably might be offered job opportunities by the relevant tax authorities while the remaining participants will be transferred to N-Power Teach to conclude their program duration.

Under the second category, for the N-POWER knowledge, young Nigerians are trained to build a knowledge economy equipped with world-class skills and certification to become relevant in the domestic and global markets. Similarly, N-POWER Build is a vocational training component of the NSIP scheme that is dedicated to the training and certification of unemployed Nigerian youths aimed at building highly competent and skilled workforce of technicians, artisans and service professionals here N-POWER Build is divided into seven trade disciplines: Automobile, Carpentry and Joinery, Electrical, Installations, Masonry, Painting And Decorating, Plumbing And Pipefitting, Welding And Fabrication. This program is designed to run for a period of twelve months which is made up of three months in training centres and nine months of apprenticeship with relevant industry employers. In addition to the provision of required training materials (consumables and tools) the beneficiaries (trainees) also get a monthly stipend of N10,000. However, trainees who qualify for the apprenticeship phase of the programme will be given their tool kits as a free exit package.

In order to foster a future for our young citizens where creativity and innovation find expression, the Nigeria government has also introduced the “every child count education policy” (N-POWER JUNIOR) to revolutionize digital literacy, functional skills acquisition, school infrastructure and teacher retraining so as to transform Nigeria as knowledge driven economy. In fact, through this programme, the government is facilitating practical creative and innovative skills that will enable Nigeria children are the catalyst for Nigeria’s emerging economy with twelve model schools being developed across six geo-political zones.

Government Enterprise Empowerment Program (GEEP)

The GEEP program was launched as one of Nigeria’s National Social Investment programs under the management of NSIO to alleviate poverty by providing access to funds for Nigerian entrepreneurs who will otherwise struggle. This program was launched with two broad objectives:

- **Access to funding:** provide microloans in an easily accessible way to those at the bottom of the pyramid who engage in commercial activities but face significant challenges with access to finance/credit
- **Financial inclusion:** through these microloan offers and access to finance, ensure that the beneficiaries are brought under the formal financial sector and can further seize the opportunity to access other credit products from financial service providers.

Consequently, GEEP launched three products namely: MarketMoni, TraderMoni, and FarmerMoni. In its literal meaning, these names were coined from the pidgin language understood by Nigerians.

- **MarketMoni** – “money for the market” – a loan scheme that provides interest & collateral-free loans to SMEs within established market association clusters.
- **TraderMoni** – “money for traders” – a microloan scheme that provides interest & collateral-free loans to petty traders & artisans in Nigeria.
- **FarmerMoni** – “money for farmers” – a loan scheme targeted at farmers belonging to aggregator farming groups.

National Cash Transfer Programme

The National Cash Transfer Programme also known as Household Uplifting Programme (HUP) is one of the social Investment programs anchored by the Federal Government of Nigeria. The programme commenced in September, 2016. It was conceived as part of the Federal Government of Nigeria’s (FGN) larger growth and social inclusion strategies aimed at addressing key social concerns in the country. It is a component of National Social Safety Nets Project (NASSP) which is supported by the World Bank, to provide financial support to targeted poor and vulnerable Nigerian households.

The programme is focused on responding to deficiencies in capacity and lack of investment in human capital, especially amongst our poorest citizens. Beneficiaries of the programme are mined from the National Social Register (NSR), comprising State Social Registers (SR) of poor and vulnerable households. The SRs are being developed with the training, supervision and guidance from the National Social Safety Nets Coordinating Office in Abuja. The programme is designed to deliver timely and accessible cash transfers to beneficiary households and sets to support development objectives and priorities, to achieve specific outcomes as outlined below:

- Improve household consumption.
- Increase in utilization of health and nutrition services.
- Improve school enrolment and attendance.
- Improve environmental sanitation and management.
- Encourage household financial and asset acquisition.
- Engage beneficiaries in sustainable livelihood.

The programme has 3 components which are as follows:

- Base Cash Transfer
- Top-Up based on State selected conditions and
- Livelihood support

Job creation

Jobs, and in particular the quantity and quality of new jobs created by economic growth, are shaping up to be one of the crucial development issues of the moment. The International Labour Organization (ILO, 2019) estimates that 440 million new jobs need to be created in the next ten years to keep up with population growth and demographic changes (ILO, 2010). It's not just creating jobs that is the challenge. Nearly half of all workers worldwide still live below the $2 a day poverty line – jobs must also pay enough to end poverty. The key determinants of the relationship between growth, poverty reduction and inequality are whether economic growth generates new jobs, the quality of these jobs, whether poor people are able to take up new opportunities, and whether jobs are stable enough to last in the face of economic shocks (Anikeze, & Udenta, 2024; Anikeze & Okpalaibekwe, 2024). But we know surprisingly little about the empirical relationships between growth episodes and different types of employment, and even less about what policies and programmes might enhance positive link-ages between the two. This is an urgent policy question, since economic growth has a very mixed record in job creation (Egwuagu, 2024). public awareness facilities, youth and students hostels development, environmental protection facilities, food security provisions, micro and macro credits delivery, rural telecommunications facilities, provision of mass transit, and maintenance culture.

Income Inequality

Kopp (2019) defines income inequality as "an extreme disparity of income distribution with a high concentration of income usually in the hands of a small percentage of a population". When income inequality thus occurs, there is a large gap between the wealth of one population segment in comparison to another. Income inequality and income disparity segregations can be analysed through a variety of segmentations such as occupation, historical income, gender, ethnicity, and geographic location (Anikeze, et al., 2024).

Income inequality in Nigeria

The gap between the rich and the poor may be a worldwide problem, but in Nigeria the scale of inequality is extreme. In one day, the richest Nigerian man can earn from his wealth 8,000 times more than what the poorest 10% of Nigerians spend on average in one year for their basic consumption. The Gender in Nigeria Report categorises Nigeria among the 30 most unequal countries in the world. According to World Bank data, in 2009 the poorest half of the population held only 22% of national income. Income inequality, as measured by the Gini Index, increased during the 2000s from 40% in 2003 to 43% in 2009

The paradox of growth in Nigeria is that as the country gets richer, only a few benefits, and the majority continues to suffer from poverty and deprivation. Former Finance Minister Okonjo-Iweala noted that: "...in Nigeria, it is clear that the top 10 percent of the population is capturing most of the growth there is and the people at the bottom are being left behind. If we don't put our minds to this problem, the whole economy may be in danger." The disparity is such that the amount of money that the richest Nigerian man can earn annually from his wealth is sufficient to lift 2 million people out of poverty for one year.

Just over 15 years into its return to democratic rule, Nigeria is in the curious position of having the world's highest-paid lawmakers preside over some of its poorest people. A Nigerian lawmaker receives an annual salary of about $118,000, equivalent to N37m – and 63 times the country's GDP per capita (2013). At the same time, phenomena of economic and social distress, such as homelessness in urban slums, high graduate unemployment, malnutrition, maternal mortality and international migration, continue to grow.

Because economic growth has been creating few opportunities for young people, there have been associated increasing levels of violent crime, as well as religious, inter-ethnic and communal clashes. Poverty and inequality in Nigeria are not due to lack of resources but to the ill-use and allocation of such resources. Continued widespread corruption and the emergence of a political elite out of touch with the daily struggles of the average Nigerian have conspired to ensure the cost of governance remains astronomical. According to former CBN Governor Charles Soludo, "This is a problem that has gone on for too long. The cost of governance in Nigeria is without doubt too high; actually, it is outrageous". As a consequence, very limited resources are left to provide basic essential services for the wider, growing Nigerian population. According to human rights lawyer Femi Falana, "It is sad to note that most Nigerians never take cognisance of the war being waged by state governments against the poor and disadvantaged citizens".

An additional problem is weak policy implementation. In fact, over the years, a number of policies and programmes have been designed with the purpose of alleviating poverty and inequality, such as: the Rural Basin Development Authority (RBDA), Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), Rural Electrification Scheme (RES), Agricultural Development Programme (ADP), National Directorate of Employment (NDE) and Better Life for Rural Women. Others were the Family Support Programme (FSP), the Rural Banking Scheme (RBS), the People's Bank, the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) and the Agricultural Credit Guarantee Scheme (ACGS). However, in the majority of cases, these policies and programmes have not been implemented effectively to result in meaningful impact on poverty. There is an urgent need to critically examine the culture of governance and transform the policies and norms that concentrate extreme wealth, privileges and very high incomes in a small percentage of the population at the top, to forestall the self-perpetuating cycle of inequality that subjugates many Nigerians.

Constraints Of Poverty Alleviation Programmes in Nigeria

The following are some of the reasons that contribute to the failure of the government's poverty eradication programmes in Nigeria (Chen, 2008, Oxfam International, 2014)

1. Poor policy formulation and coordination.
2. Policy discontinuity and lack of sustainability.
3. Absence of policy framework, institutional framework and delivery machinery.
4. Absence of target setting for ministries, agencies and programmes.
5. Absence of coordination, complementation and monitoring.

In the literature, three theories abound on the effectiveness of public infrastructure on poverty alleviation. The first theory argued that investment in education and health is more relevant to the goal of poverty alleviation than physical infrastructure As earlier analyzed, infrastructure is important for ensuring that growth and development is consistent with poverty alleviation.

Access to at least minimal infrastructure services is one of the essential criteria for defining welfare. The poor can be identified as those who are unable to consume a basic quantity of clean water and who are subject to unsanitary surroundings with extremely limited mobility or communications beyond their immediate settlement (WFP, 2019). As a result, they have more health problems and fewer employment opportunities. Access to clean water and sanitation has the most obvious and direct consumption benefits of reduction in mortality rate and morbidity. It also increases the productive capacity of the poor and can affect men and women in different ways

Theoretical Framework

Social Exclusion

Theory-Popularized in the 1960"s, the concept finds its root in the economic crisis of France at the time (Silver, 1994). Social exclusion is conceived as multi-dimensional, operationalized as a combination of material deprivation, insufficient access to social rights, a low degree of social participation and a lack of normative integration (Jehoel-Gijsbers & Vrooman, 2007). The theory emphasizes the lack or denial of resources, rights, goods and services, and the inability to participate in the normal relationships and activities, available to the majority of people in a society, whether in economic, social, cultural or political arenas. The relevance of the theory stems from that poverty could result of social exclusion which exacerbates income inequality, poor standard of living, and unemployment.

Empirical review

Bello et al, (2010) examine poverty situation in Nigeria by employing the data of economic growth and millennium development goals (MDGs) expenditure. The methodology employed was panel data analysis consisting of pooled model, fixed-effects, random-effects and weighted least square. The results revealed that, a unit increase in per capita GDP led to 0.6 percent increase in poverty. Similarly, a unit increase in MDG expenditure resulted in 11.56 units increase in relative poverty in the pooled model. The study concluded that economic growth and MDG spending has not substantially reduced poverty over the sample period.

Atoloye (1997) in the study "Strategy for growth -led poverty alleviation in Nigeria." asserts that rapid and sustained economic growth utilizing a new industrial strategy calls for proficient use of the natural advantages of modern infrastructure, which further serves as a poverty reducing strategy, noting that economic growth can only progress in a stable macroeconomic environment and with the right combination of factors of production. According to the study, economic growth cannot be sustained if it gives rise to trade deficit that cannot be financed. Thus, "poverty becomes accentuated when current resources are being used to finance obligations. The study tries to establish link between heavily indebted countries and high poverty level, suggesting further that income that would have been spent on the provision of basic infrastructure are used to service external debts.

Ibrahim et al, (2008) assess the determinants of poverty as well the poverty coping strategies among farming households in Nasarawa State, Nigeria. The study employed simple random sampling to select 150 farming households and used Costs of Calorie method and Discriminant Analysis to determine the incidence of poverty as well as its determinants respectively. The incidence of poverty among the sampled households was found to be high and the major determinants of poverty include household size, number of income sources of the household head, number of household members employed outside agriculture and the number of literate adult males and females in the household. The major poverty coping strategies include skipping of meals, reduction in the quantity of meals served and engaging in wage labour. The study recommends that the farming households should be effectively involved in the formulation of strategies for imparting knowledge on family planning to the farming households.

Maduagwu (2000) in the study "Alleviating poverty in Nigeria" were of the view that both foreign and domestic investment will enhance economic growth and development, but other essentials are required to achieve the goal of economic growth and development such as rule of law, and provision of infrastructure .The study stressed that rule of law is essential because "it ensures life and personal security, it also provides a stable framework of rights and obligations which can help to reduce political risks to investors and to cut down transportation costs". According to the study, business does not thrive in an environment of unchecked abuses of political power, unchecked violence by security personnel, and unchecked corruption (official and non-official corruption)". Corroborating 1997, World Development report which concluded that no market can exist without effective property rights, and that effective property rights depends on fulfilling the following three conditions; protection from theft, violence and other acts of perditions; protection from arbitrary government actions ranging from unpredictable, ad hoc regulations and taxes to outright corruption that disrupt business activities; and a reasonably fair and predictable judiciary.

Okunmadewa (1998) in the study "Domestic and international response to poverty alleviation in Nigeria" was of the view that in Nigeria, international agencies such as European Union, Department for international Development (DFID), Food Foundation and the UN group are very active in poverty reduction activities. The UNDP, UNICEF, UNFDA, ILO, WHO, and the role of NGOs in poverty alleviation in Nigeria has been observed to be a veritable and effective channel to ensure programme implementation effectiveness, particularly in poverty reduction projects in view of on-the-ground presence and first-hand knowledge of the needs and interest of the poor.

Assessing government's interventionist program in bridging the rich-poor divide, Kennedy (2019) examined the effect of governance on income distribution and income inequality in Nigeria, using the federal government social intervention policy programme of Trader Moni. Employing content analysis, the study analysed the scheme between 2018 and 2019. It found that the implementation of the Trader Moni social intervention policy failed to address its aim of income re-distribution, stating that it was skewed in such a way to generate vote for the ruling party during the Osun governorship and 2019 general elections.

Chancel et al (2019) estimated the evolution of income inequality in Africa from 1990 to 2017 using content analysis that combined surveys, tax data and national accounts in a systematic manner. Findings suggest that income inequality in Africa is quite high, standing at par with Latin America or India. It revealed that Southern and Central Africa are particularly unequal. In addition, the bulk of the continent-wide income inequality comes from the within-country component, while the between-country component was slightly reduced in the last two decades, resulting from higher growth in poorer countries. Furthermore, inequality was rather stable over the period, with the exception of Southern Africa. Lastly, the dualism between agriculture and other sectors, which includes mining rents, was an important determinant of inequality.

Similarly, Fosu (2018), in a literature study and also employing content analysis, assessed the economic structure, growth, and evolution of inequality and poverty in Africa. His study found from the literature that the recent relatively impressive growth in Africa does not seem sustainable considering the economic structure accompanying the recent growth record has been improving agricultural labourer or productivity, a reduction of the agricultural labour share and increasing manufacturing employment. It found that while the efficacy of translating growth into poverty reduction remains lower for Africa than elsewhere, there is evidence of poverty convergence recently in Africa, contrary to that for developing countries generally. The study showed the dominant importance, on average, of growth for poverty reduction in Africa but also underscored the critical role of inequality, especially for certain countries. Exploring why inequality is particularly high in Africa, it revealed that ethnic fractionalization, limited tertiary education, and poor governance as major culprits, and inequality of opportunity as the dominant component. The study identifies the dual-economy nature of colonial arrangements as the genesis for Africa's high inequality, while proposing an enhanced pro-poor Lewis-type modern-sector enlargement as a potential solution.

Brown and Ogbonna (2018) examined the relationship between income inequality and poverty in Nigeria from 1980 to 2017. The study employed the Error Correction Model (ECM) and the Granger Causality techniques, using the variables of inequality, poverty, unemployment, and life expectancy at birth. Findings revealed that the national poverty index increased inequality but was statistically insignificant.

Ajibola, Loto and Enilolobo (2018) empirically examined poverty and inequality in Nigeria with respect to its implications for inclusive growth between 1980 and 2013. The study used Multiple regression and the Granger Causality techniques on the variables of poverty, GDP growth rate, government expenditure on health, inequality (measured by per capita income), government expenditure on education, and unemployment. No causality was found between poverty and inequality, in addition, per capita income had a negative impact on poverty.

Using the Lorenz curve and a descriptive method of analysis, Lucky and Achebelema (2018) examined poverty and income inequality in Nigeria using an NBS 2010 survey. The food poverty line, absolute poverty line, subjective poverty measure and the dollar-per-day poverty line were used to measure poverty, while the Gini coefficient was used to measure income inequality. Findings revealed that significant proportions of the Nigerian population are living below the poverty line. In addition, it also found that there is a wide gap between the rich and the poor in Nigeria.

Taking a closer look at the pattern of income distribution on the monthly budgetary allocation of households under certain socio-economic characteristics in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, Frank, Agom, and Obot (2017) used descriptive statistics to analyse respondents selected from high, medium and low-income earners areas of Uyo metropolis. The household's budget was assessed based on occupation, household size, education and income status. Household income distribution pattern showed that 68% of the households in the study were found to be low-income households. Household budgeted expenditure, as assessed by different socio-economic characteristics, revealed that except for the high-income earners, all other groups spent more than half their income on food.

Ogbeide and Agu (2015), in a study, tried to establish whether or not there is a causal relationship between poverty and inequality in Nigeria, adopting the Granger causality technique on a data set that covers 1980 to 2010. Variables employed in the analysis were inequality (Gini index), poverty (national poverty index), unemployment rate, and life expectancy rate at birth. Findings revealed that a direct line of causality exists between poverty and inequality as well as an indirect channel through unemployment and low life expectancy on inequality, thereby exacerbating poverty in Nigeria.

Mbanasor, Nwachukwu, Agwu, Njoku and Onwumere (2013) analysed income inequality and poverty dynamics among rural farm households in Abia State, Nigeria, between 2010 and 2011. Analytically, the study used the Gini coefficient to estimate income distribution. In contrast, the poverty indicators (using mean household income, headcount ratio and poverty gap index) were used to measure the poverty line, poverty incidence and gap. The income distribution showed a high level of inequality (Gini index of 0.987), with per capita income falling below the operational national minimum wage. The poverty gap and incidence gave a scary picture of a worsening poverty situation, using the poverty indicators as parameters (headcount index of 0.567 and a poverty gap of 0.568).

Cheema and Sial (2012) estimated a set of fixed-effect and random-effect models to ascertain the long-run relationship between growth, income inequality, and poverty using pooled data from 8 household income and expenditure surveys conducted between 1992/‟93 and 2007/‟08 in Pakistan. The findings showed that growth and inequality play significant roles in affecting poverty and that the effect of the former is substantially larger than that of the latter. In addition, growth has a significant and positive impact on inequality.

Also, the finding revealed that the absolute magnitude of the net growth elasticity of poverty is smaller than that of the gross growth elasticity of poverty, suggesting that a rise in inequality offsets some of the growth effects on poverty. Furthermore, the analysis at a regional level showed that both the gross and net growth elasticity of poverty are higher in rural areas than in urban areas, whereas the inequality elasticity of poverty is higher in urban areas than in rural area

METHODOLOGY

This study was carried out in five randomly selected major cities in South East Nigeria (Enugu, Umuahia, Abakaliki, Anambra, and Owerri). Using Taro Yamane sampling techniques, 351 respondents were drawn from the total population of 2876 residents in the five selected cities in South East Nigeria. A Structured questionnaire was used as the instrument for data collection. The data collected were analysed using simple percentages, while the hypotheses were tested using chi-square at the 0.05 level of significance.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Research Question one

What are the effects of N-power program on job creation in South East Nigeria?

Table 1.2: The respondents view on the effects of N-power program on job creation in South East Nigeria

The effects of the N-power program on job creation in South East Nigeria	Frequency	Percent
N-power had equipped beneficiaries with valuable skills in areas such as teaching, healthcare, agriculture, etc.	88	25.07
The programs' monthly stipend of N30,000 has improved beneficiaries' financial stability enabling them to support themselves and their families.	91	25.92
N-power has encouraged entrepreneurship among beneficiaries with many starting their own business.	89	25.35
N-power has helped reduce youth restiveness, social unrest and crime rate in South East Nigeria	83	23.64
Total	**351**	**100.0**

Source: Researcher, 2024

From the table 4.6, 25.07% of the respondents asserted N power had equipped beneficiaries with valuable skills in areas such as teaching, healthcare and agriculture, 25.92% of the respondents were of the opinion the N power programs monthly stipend of N30,000 has improved beneficiaries financial stability enabling them to support themselves and their families , 25.35% of the respondents concurred that N power has encouraged entrepreneurship among beneficiaries with many starting their own business and finally 23.64% of the respondents agreed that N power has helped reduce youth restiveness, social unrest and crime rate in south east Nigeria. From the findings of table 1.1 above it could be inferred N power program has positive significant effect on job creation in South East Nigeria.

Research Question Two

What are the effects of Government Enterprise and Empowerment program in enhancing small scale business in South East Nigeria?

Table 1.2: The respondents view on effects of Government Enterprise and Empowerment program in enhancing small scale business in South East Nigeria

Effects of Government Enterprise and Empowerment program in enhancing small scale business in South East Nigeria	Frequency	Percent
Government Enterprise and Empowerment Program has provided access to affordable credit facilities for small scale entrepreneurs, enabling them to expand their businesses and improve profitability	103	29.34
Government Enterprise and Empowerment Program has encouraged entrepreneurship among youths and women in South East, leading to the establishment of new business	86	24.50
N-power has encouraged entrepreneurship among beneficiaries with many starting their own business	84	23.93
N-power has provided equipment and start-up capital to young entrepreneurs	78	22.22
Total	**351**	**100.0**

Source: Researcher, 2024

From the table 1.2, 29.34% of the respondents were of the opinion that government enterprise and empowerment program has provided access to affordable credit facilities for small scale entrepreneurs, enabling them to expand their business and improve profitability, 24.50% of the respondents were of the opinion that government Enterprise and empowerment program has encouraged entrepreneurship among youths and women in south east, leading to the establishment of new businesses, 23.93% of the respondents concurred that N power has encouraged entrepreneurship among beneficiaries with many starting their own business and finally 22.22% agreed that N power has provided equipment and start-up capital to youth entrepreneurs in south east Nigeria. The findings of the table therefore revealed that government enterprise and empowerment program have positive significant effect in enhancing small scale business in south East Nigeria.

Research Question Three

What are the effects of conditional cash transfer in addressing income inequality in south East Nigeria?

Table 1.2: The respondents view on effects of conditional cash transfer in addressing income inequality in south East Nigeria

Effects of conditional cash transfer in addressing income inequality in south East Nigeria	Frequency	Percent
Conditional cash transfer has helped bridge the inequality gap by providing financial support to low-income households	80	22.79
Conditional cash transfers have also improved education and health outcomes in South East Nigeria	86	24.50
Conditional cash transfer has economically empowered women and vulnerable groups in South East Nigeria	84	23.93
Conditional cash transfer had ensured human capital development of children from low-income earners	101	28.77
Total	**351**	**100.0**

Source: Researcher, 2024

From the table 1.2, 29.34% of the respondents were of the opinion conditional cash transfer have helped bridge the inequality gap by providing financial support to low income households, 24.50% of the respondents were of the opinion that conditional cash transfer had also improved educational and health outcomes in South East Nigeria, 23.93% of the respondents concurred that conditional cash transfer had economically empowered women and vulnerable groups in South East Nigeria, and finally 22.22% agreed that conditional cash transfer hand ensured human capital development of children from low-income earners. The findings of the table therefore revealed that conditional cash transfer has positive significant effect in addressing income inequality in South East Nigeria.

Test of Hypotheses

The hypotheses were tested using the chi-square statistical tool

H_{01}: N-power program has no positive significant effect on job creation in South East Nigeria

Table 1.1: Chi-Square table for testing hypothesis I

O	E	$O-E$	$(O-E)^2$	$\frac{(O-E)^2}{E}$
88	70.2	17.8	316.84	4.51
91	70.2	20.8	432.64	6.16
89	70.2	18.8	353.44	5.03
83	70.2	12.8	163.84	2.33
351				**18.03**

Table value = 5.991, calculated value = 18.03

Decision: Since the calculated value (18.03) which is greater than the table value (5.99), the Ho (null hypothesis) is therefore rejected. This means N power program has positive significant effect on Job Creation in South East Nigeria

H_{02}: Government Enterprise and Empowerment program has no positive significant effecting in enhancing small scale business in South East Nigeria

Table 1.2: Chi-Square table for testing hypothesis II

O	E	$O-E$	$(O-E)^2$	$\frac{(O-E)^2}{E}$
103	70.2	32.8	1,075.85	15.32
86	70.2	15.8	249.64	3.56
84	70.2	13.8	190.44	2.71
78	70.2	7.8	60.84	0.86
351				**22.45**

Table value = 5.991, calculated value = 22.45

Decision: Since the calculated value (22.45) is greater than the table value (5.99), the H_o (null hypothesis) is rejected. This means Government Enterprise program has positive significant effect in enhancing small scale business in South East Nigeria.

H_{02}: Conditional cash transfer has no positive significant effect in addressing income inequality in South East Nigeria

Table 1.2: Chi Square table for testing hypothesis II

O	E	$O-E$	$(O-E)^2$	$\frac{(O-E)^2}{E}$
80	70.2	10.2	104.04	1.48
86	70.2	15.8	249.64	3.56
84	70.2	13.8	190.44	2.71
101	70.2	30.8	948.64	13.51
351				**21.26**

Table value = 5.991, calculated value = 21.26

Decision: Since the calculated value (21.26) is greater than the table value (5.99), the H_o (null hypothesis) is rejected. This means conditional cash transfer has positive significant effect in addressing income inequality in south East Nigeria

Summary of findings

The findings of the study revealed

1. N-power program has positive significant effect on Job Creation in South East Nigeria
2. Government Enterprise program has positive significant effect in enhancing small scale business in South East Nigeria
3. conditional cash transfer has positive significant effect in addressing income inequality in south East Nigeria

Conclusion

This empirical research on the effects of national social investment programs on poverty reduction in Southeast Nigeria has provided valuable insights into the impact of such initiatives. The findings therefore draw the conclusion that national social investment programs have the potential to significantly reduce poverty levels in the region. By targeting vulnerable populations and providing them with access to education, healthcare, and other essential services, these programs can help to alleviate the socio-economic challenges faced by individuals and communities. The research highlights the importance of sustained and well-targeted investment in social development initiatives as a means of poverty reduction. By prioritizing the needs of the most disadvantaged populations and working to address systemic barriers to economic opportunity, national social investment programs can play a vital role in promoting inclusive growth and reducing income inequality. Overall, the findings of this study underscore the importance of continued investment in social development initiatives as a means of poverty reduction in Southeast Nigeria. By working to address the underlying causes of poverty and providing vulnerable populations with access to the resources and support they need to thrive, national social investment programs have the potential to make a meaningful difference in the lives of those who need it most.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made;

1. National social investment agency should develop programs that are tailored to the specific needs and challenges of South East Nigeria which will help address the succession agitation in the area
2. Local communities should be actively engaging in planning and implementation of social investment programs
3. National social investment program should focus in investing in education and vocational training programs to equip individuals with the skill needed for gainful employment.

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